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# The office

A PHOTOGRAPHY SPECIAL

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# The office

A PHOTOGRAPHY SPECIAL

So many of us have now been out of the office for such a long time that it's easy to forget how we felt in one. The photographers and columnists in this special issue remind us, reinterpreting our workplace lives: from pressure and conformity to fellowship and freedom. And if you don't miss yours at all, we celebrate that too

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# TIM HARFORD

## THE UNDERCOVER ECONOMIST

In February 2014, London's Underground was partially shut down by a strike that forced many commuters to find new ways to get to work. The disruption lasted just 48 hours, but when three economists (Shaun Larcom, Ferdinand Rauch and Tim Willems) studied data from the city's transport network, they discovered something interesting.

Tens of thousands of commuters did not return to their original routes, presumably having found faster or more pleasant ways to reach their destination. A few hours of disruption were enough to make them realise that they had been doing commuting wrong their entire adult lives.

I mention this because we are at a turning point in the pandemic. Many people, myself included, have largely been working from home. For months it has been hard to shake the feeling that this will last for ever. Now we are contemplating a vaccine-fuelled return to normality – maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon.

What the 2014 Tube strike teaches us is that temporary disruptions can have permanent effects. Sometimes there are scars that do not heal; sometimes a crisis teaches us lessons we can use when it has passed.

So what have we learnt from the remote-working experiment? And to what extent will it continue after the virus has retreated? One obvious point is that, like a strike-delayed commuter who invests in a new bike, both workers and employers have sunk considerable time and effort into acquiring the equipment and skills necessary to support the change. Such investments will make working from home cheaper and more tempting in future.

I suspect, however, that the crucial step is not investment but information. We have learnt that working from home is more productive than we had guessed.

Emma Harrington and Natalia Emanuel, two young economists at Harvard University, found that before the pandemic remote workers at one large company had been less productive than office-based workers. Yet when everyone switched to remote work, overall productivity increased. The explanation of the apparent contradiction is that working from home is intrinsically more productive, but this truth was obscured by the fact that fewer productive workers were attracted to working from home. Now that employers have discovered the apparent productivity penalty is illusory, perhaps remote work will be far more popular in future.

FRAN MONKS

## What can we learn from the great WFH experiment?

Similarly, a famous study of remote work by Nicholas Bloom and colleagues analysed a randomised experiment at Ctrip, a large Chinese travel agency, in which some staff were assigned to work from home. The expectation was that productivity would fall but the costs of providing office space would fall too. Instead, Bloom and colleagues found that workers became sharply more productive at home.

All this suggests that the pandemic, like the Tube strike, will be the jolt that pushes us into doing the remote working we should have been doing all along. But I am not so sure.

One point that is easily overlooked is that, in both these studies, the workers in question were moving from taking calls in a call centre to taking calls at home. In Bloom's research, the home workers and office workers used the same equipment and order-flow software, did the same tasks and were rewarded with the same bonuses.

This should also be a warning not to draw conclusions that are too broad. In a well-run call centre, the protocols for assigning, monitoring and closing out tasks are well established. They do not require a chain of group emails to figure out what is happening or to schedule a Zoom call. The same is not true of much knowledge work.

As Cal Newport, author of the forthcoming *A World Without Email*, pointed out in the New Yorker last May: "The knowledge work pursued in many modern offices – thinking, investigating, synthesizing, writing, planning, organizing, and so on – tends to be fuzzy and disorganized compared to the structured processes of, say, industrial manufacturing."

Newport's view is that this is a solvable problem, but most offices simply haven't got their act together. Sitting in an open-plan office allows a team to muddle through without realising quite how much time they waste on busywork and co-ordination. A few knowledge jobs, such as IT support, are properly systematised to allow focused work without endless ad hoc emails. Newport believes that others will follow once we all wise up. Or we may find that certain kinds of knowledge work are too unruly to systematise. Improvisation will remain the only mode of working – and, for that, face-to-face contact seems essential.

**'Sitting in an open-plan office allows a team to muddle through without realising quite how much time they waste on busywork'**

A recent survey by Bloom, with Jose Maria Barrero and Steven Davis, estimates that remote work in the US will become more than four times as common after the pandemic, increasing from 5 per cent to 22 per cent of work days. That would be a big swing back towards normality – the researchers estimate that in May 2020 more than 60 per cent of paid workers in the US were operating from home. But it would still be a seismic fall in demand for commuting and city-centre office space.

I hope that the crisis teaches us how to do productive and fulfilling work from home. But it seems that most of us, most of the time, are destined to return to the office in due course. If so, I hope the crisis teaches us how to do productive and fulfilling work wherever we may be. FT

*Tim Harford's new book is "How to Make the World Add Up"*



ILLUSTRATION BY CLAIRE MERCHLINSKY

INVENTORY ANNE MARIE RAFFERTY
NURSE ACADEMIC

# ‘I’d love to see a new deal for nurses as one of the positive things to come out of the pandemic’

**Anne Marie Rafferty, 62, is professor of health policy at King’s College London and president of the Royal College of Nursing. She was appointed CBE for services to healthcare in 2008.**

**What was your childhood or earliest ambition?**
I certainly knew what I didn’t want to be: I knew from a very early age that I was gay, and I used to pray, as a Catholic, that I wouldn’t be. I was a real tomboy. I guess if I wanted to be anything it was a footballer. I was pretty good, considerably better than the boys I played with.
**Private school or state school? University or straight into work?**
State schools: St Marie’s primary school and St Andrew’s High School, both in Kirkcaldy, Fife. I wouldn’t have been able to go to university without a full grant – student nurses these days don’t have the same level of support and we want to address that. I went to the University of Edinburgh, the first to offer an undergraduate degree in nursing, then worked clinically at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh and in Nottingham at Queen’s Medical Centre. I combined Nottingham with a part-time MPhil. I knew I wanted to do more research, and I was, I think, the first nurse to get a DPhil from Oxford.
**Who was or still is your mentor?**
Linda Aiken from the University of Pennsylvania. I went there on the Harkness fellowship in health policy and we’re still collaborating 25 years later. She’s so generous with her time and talent. I also take my hat off to Charles Webster, my DPhil supervisor. Our current principal at King’s, Ed Byrne, has also been really supportive: I owe him a great debt of gratitude.
**How physically fit are you?**
I’ve become moderately fit. I cycle, I try to play tennis and I jog. Getting up from the floor gets increasingly difficult – I’m starting to understand how older people can fall and not be able to get up.
**Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?**
A mix of both. They run in tandem.
**How politically committed are you?**
Quite. One of the highlights of my RCN role has been campaigning. I definitely have a passion for making a difference. I am left of centre.
**What would you like to own that you don’t currently possess?**
A beach hut.
**What’s your biggest extravagance?**
Probably food. I love going to restaurants – with that comes conviviality and conversation. And travel.
**In what place are you happiest?**
Running along the Fife coastal path. Being by the sea. For me, happiness is tied up with peace of mind and calmness.
**What ambitions do you still have?**
To hold on to my health. I’d love to see a new deal for nurses as one of the positive things to come out of the pandemic. And I’d love to sort out my forehand in tennis.
**What drives you on?**
When things I see are wrong, I feel a moral compunction to do something about it. I’ve got quite a strong sense of social justice. I am also driven along by the energy and enthusiasm of others.
**What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?**
Being here: physically and mentally. I have gone through some pretty bleak and dark patches in my life and have thought about ending it many times. Professionally, getting my DPhil – that was a big jump. And being elected fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences. I am one of the few nurses to get in.
**What do you find most irritating in other people?**
People who talk across other people, don’t listen, interrupt, don’t let others finish what they’re saying.
**If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would she think?**
She would be shocked and stunned: “This has got to be some kind of joke, someone has to be playing a trick on me.”
**Which object that you’ve lost do you wish you still had?**
My classic Ford Fiesta was stolen. She was a real wee beauty, in mint condition, and I was very attached to her.
**What is the greatest challenge of our time?**
What the pandemic is revealing about rampant discrimination across race, class and gender lines. A potentially apocalyptic future is staring us in the face: the fragmentation of society. We’re hearing a lot of pain from people whose voices haven’t been properly heard before.
**Do you believe in an afterlife?**
I try not to. But my Catholic upbringing gets the better of me: the catechism, all those images of purgatory and hell. As a Scottish Catholic you get the worst of all worlds.
**If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?**
Nine. Academics never give 10. FT

*Interview by Hester Lacey*

DARINA TSVETKOVA

# A different perspective

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TECH WORLD

BY LEO LEWIS IN TOKYO

# New year, new YouTube: how to detox your feed

Japan's mid-December alarm over resurgent Covid-19 numbers returned Tokyo to that state where work, rest and play arrive through a screen. Rising susceptibility to earworms – those tunes or sounds you just cannot shake – felt closely correlated.

As 2020 ran down the clock, I found myself stuck with three. One was the opening bars of "Moi Lolita", the moody, weapons-grade-catchy, 20-year-old electronica hit by the Corsican pop sensation Alizée. The second was the "kiri-kiri-kiri" vocal trill that the female lead of the nightmarish Japanese horror classic *Audition* uses while torturing her fiancé. The third (no less unsettling) was the sing-song catchphrase of KFC's garlic-chicken campaign.

None of this trio were remotely welcome brain guests; all had been bundled in by the era-defining combination of YouTube, algorithm and the personality one assumes when armed with time, spurious search missions and pandemic restrictions, so a friend in the software industry suggested I enter 2021 with an algo detox of his own devising.

YouTube, he said, has a particular knack for holding up a mirror to your soul, so borrow another. You may prefer to think of yourself as someone able to scroll aloofly past "The top 10 dirtiest cheaters in esports who got destroyed", "Uncle Roger review Gordon Ramsay fried rice" or "4000° Plasma Proto-lightsaber build". But the algo knows better. And is annoyingly right. The first stage of detox, he suggested, is to own your click-guilt.

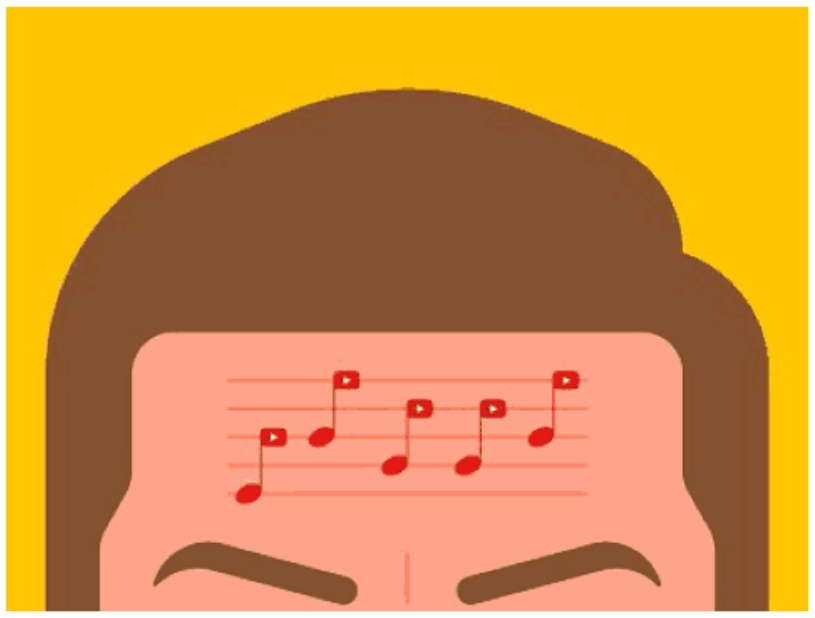

ILLUSTRATION BY PÄTÉ

The preponderance of KFC ads could be easily, if calorifically, explained. The other two earworms took a bit more retracing. The plunge had started with a podcast – the BBC's film review show in which Mark Kermode overlays the week's latest releases with his encyclopedic knowledge of cinema history.

In one episode, his co-presenter happened to mention the word "Malbec" – the full-bodied Argentine wine of which Kermode professed complete ignorance. A perfectly reasonable blind spot, but was it really possible, I wondered meanly, to have seen as many films as he has and never to have come across Malbec?

The search functions of YouTube seem tooled for this exact species of snarky inquisition and, after various refinements and blind alleys, led to the wine-centric 2006 rom-com *A Good Year* and, from there, to its soundtrack, which included the Alizée chart-topper.

> 'This network had, for all its semblance of complete freedom, become an elegant, addictive cage of my own making'

Throughout all of this, of course, YouTube's algorithms were fizzing away, recalibrating the column that suggests what to watch next. It now had me bang to rights. It already knew me as an addict of game walkthroughs, southern BBQ recipes, sports bloopers, DIY pranks and TED talks by self-satisfied gurus. A dozen clicks later it knew that all I wanted in lockdown was a list of The Top 5 Scariest Japanese Horror Movies – a quintet of such supreme chillingness that *Audition* only just scraped in.

These most recent rabbit holes were just part of a greater lattice of digital tunnels and burrows that define a YouTube history created by Covid-19 and by hours of chain-clicking and algo-abduction. This network had, for all its semblance of complete freedom, become an elegant, addictive cage of my own making. My friend's detox suggestion was to make it the cage of better, purer souls.

His idea was that rather than manipulating YouTube by blocking certain themes or providers, I should give my two children (seven and 10) unfettered – but supervised – access to my YouTube account over the course of a rainy weekend. By the time I returned to its embrace, their tastes, ran the theory, would have colonised the algorithm and, if we were lucky, would give me a clearer insight into their passions and pastimes than the crude analogue observations that informed parenting 1.0.

The rainy weekend duly arrived. The project was undertaken with extraordinary sincerity. The detox was a catastrophic success. True, my feed is now shorn of prurience, cynicism, cherry-smoked cholesterol and Japanese horror. In its place is a more wholesome menu of Lionel Messi goals, cup-stacking world records and Lego take-downs of pivotal Harry Potter scenes. But the earworms are disastrously more penetrative. Inescapable mental soundtracks for 2021 now include Yonezu Kenshi's pop ballad "Lemon", Tanjiro's theme from the anime *Demon Slayer* and two Americans singing the entire plot of *The Lord of the Rings* in 99 seconds.

The only logical option, though, to get rid of my kids' taste from my YouTube sidebar, is to set some new algo-disruptors loose on the task. I'm sure it will end well. FT

*Leo Lewis is the FT's Asia business editor*

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[2] Annual global cement production in 2019: 4.1 billion tonnes. Precast industry is 30% of total. Source: IEA.
[3] Typical passenger vehicle emits around 4.6 metric tonnes of $CO_2$ per year. Source: EPA.

# The office

Three years in the office were enough to push *Simon Kuper* into working from home more than two decades ago – and he's glad so many of us are now joining him. Photographs by *Thomas Demand*

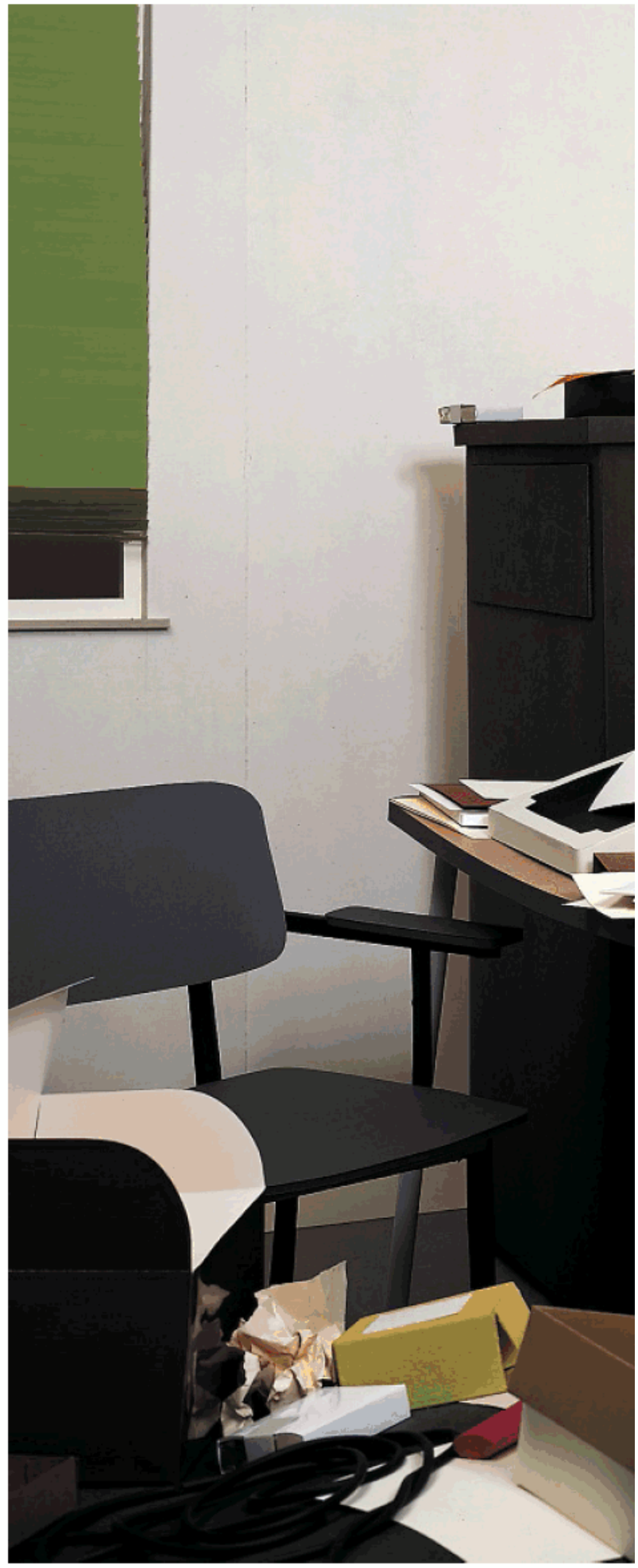
This week 26 years ago, I started office life. Wearing a cheap suit and awkwardly knotted tie, I clicked through the security gate at One Southwark Bridge, London, the FT's office from 1989 to 2019 – and a sick building if ever I saw one.

At about 5pm that first day, the full horror of the office-worker's existence dawned on me. School had done its job of preparing me for the regimented daily tedium. But at least school generally ended mid-afternoon. In the office, long after the January night had fallen, my new colleagues kept bashing away at their computers in a room where the windows didn't even open. Careers spent seated under fluorescent lights had denatured their bodies and skins. One day, I realised, I would be them. I'm not big on Wordsworth, but I remembered the lines that John Mortimer's fictional barrister Rumpole was always quoting:

*Shades of the prison-house begin to close*
*Upon the growing Boy*

I made my escape from the office early, and have worked from home for 22 years now. I only hope the pandemic permanently liberates others from these inhuman places.

Leaf through this issue and you'll see some of the things that office-workers leave behind each morning. The family snaps on the edges of Endia Beal's portraits are vestiges of what Orwell satirically called "ownlife": the suspect private sphere. Jessica Bernard's pictures of absurd "team-building" games stand for the lost world of play. Hiroshi Okamoto captures the monkey suits that drain ▶



ZIMMER/ROOM, 1996

◂ office-workers' individuality. In Alex Prager's renderings of a "holiday party", the Gothic figures with rictus grins look straight out of a horror movie. Saskia Groneberg's sad office pot plants are faint signals from distant nature.

All offices are versions of each other, whether they produce invoices, architectural drawings or newspaper articles. I recognise most of the horrors in these pictures, and remember others. Proper food – scarce anyway in mid-1990s London – didn't exist at Southwark Bridge. The canteen specialised in British-East German fusion cuisine. Some people spent lunchtime at their desks eating plastic bags, which on closer inspection turned out to be sandwiches. In a tiny act of rebellion, a few like-minded souls and I would go out to a local coffee shop that was known as "Toilet Harpers" because it occupied a converted former public toilet.

My colleagues were mostly good company. Say what you will about journalists, but because the nature of the job is getting information from other people, they tend to be sociable types and good listeners. The profession also has a decent male-female balance, except at the top.

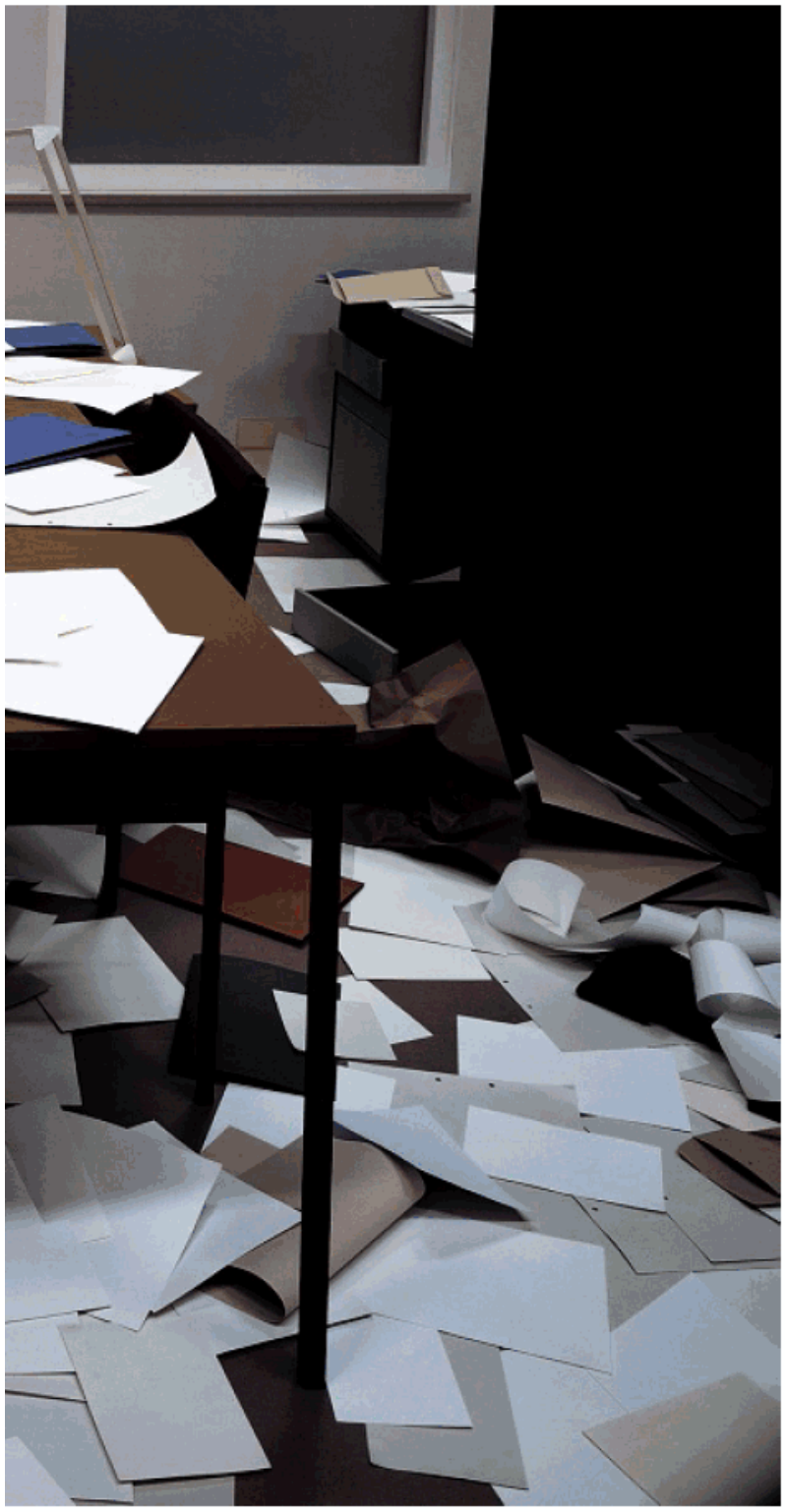
But I came to realise that my older colleagues had been institutionalised by office life, sometimes over the course of 40 years. They no longer even expected to see natural light on workdays half the year, except on their morning walk from home to Tube. Like lifers in jail, they couldn't quite cope in the outside world any more. Some only saw their children briefly at night, if that. They had lost contact with old friends because, even on weekends, commute plus work left them too drained to leave their neighbourhoods.

Instead, they had shifted their emotional existence to the office. As in any workplace, people who had worked together for decades took care of each other. One colleague told me she'd gone to confide in the workaholic managing editor about a personal disaster that required her to take time off. "You won't tell anyone, will you?" she asked him. He said, "If you only knew half the things people tell me in this room..."

The FT's editorials in those days were pretty Thatcherite, but the workplace was soft-hearted. A burnt-out case who could no longer



BÜRO/OFFICE, 1995



**‘When I realised I could write my column from anywhere, I bought a flat in Paris. I suspect the FT didn’t even notice I’d moved’**

write was given a job ferrying messages between desks. When a team of expensive consultants performed a time-and-motion study of our work processes and recommended sacking him, the staff rebelled.

The flipside of closeness was excessive socialising. People felt they had to be there till 7pm anyway, so in those pre-online days (Southwark Bridge only got internet in about 1998) they might as well pass the time chatting. The challenge was to slack off without the bosses noticing. I hit on a trick that worked best for white men: leave a suit jacket draped permanently over my empty chair, so that whenever a boss walked by, generally a fellow white man of similar educational background, he’d think, “Ah, Kuper, good chap, working all hours.”

Meanwhile, I worried that I would never escape. Most of my colleagues seemed to have given up hope. My friends in other offices, still not quite 30, had already begun nattering about their pensions. I told a colleague who actually covered pensions of my ambition to retire at 30. “Not a chance, mate,” he said. One day, I saw a man in his sixties limping through the City with his briefcase and thought, with horror: that could be me.

In summer 1998 I went to tell the FT’s editor that I was resigning. He did his best to conceal his delight. I said I was going to freelance, writing a column for The Observer newspaper. “That’s a leaky ship,” he frowned. The Observer was founded in 1791, but lifelong office-workers tend to be risk-averse. Leaving the building, I felt as if I was handing in my junior membership card of the Establishment.

But it turned out that even in 1998, all the technology for homeworking already existed: the internet, the telephone and the Tube for those occasional visits to offices. I no longer wasted hours a day commuting or chatting. I’d made sure to leave the FT on good terms, so I continued to sell it the odd article. I soon realised that it wasn’t the work that had got me down; it was the workplace. Popping into Southwark Bridge months after resigning, I passed a former colleague on the stairs. She glanced at me with half-recognition, stopped, scrutinised me and said: “You look healthier.” That’s because on sunny days I worked from a deckchair in Regent’s Park.

I discovered over time that my three years at Southwark Bridge paid off. Because I’d spent endless hours with people at the FT and knew the corporate culture, a quick email was usually enough to ascertain whether they’d take an article. Later the FT gave me a column. When I realised I could write it from almost anywhere, I bought a flat in Paris. I suspect the FT didn’t even notice I’d moved until years later. After I acquired a family, that flat became my workplace. It’s where I wrote this article.

Quite accidentally, I had anticipated a sequence that may now become common: spend your first couple of working years in the office getting acculturated, then gradually detach until finally you’re living more comfortably and cheaply 300 miles away. Then the big city becomes an occasional meeting-place and playground, instead of an overburdened human supply chain for 1980s offices.

My commute is now a 12-minute bike ride. I no longer wear suits. In fact, I’ve spent much of this longest winter sitting at my desk in a woolly hat. When I want to talk to someone, I decide who it is, so I no longer have to listen to Joe from Graphics talk me through last night’s Chelsea game while my will to live fades. When I do have to dress up or see colleagues, it feels like a thrilling adventure.

Early in the pandemic, about 80 per cent of employees reported that they liked working from home, according to research by McKinsey. I hope they can keep doing it forever. FT

# Key workers

Plants are as ubiquitous in the modern-day office as the water cooler – yet, in their own quiet way, represent a spark of anarchy. Photographer *Saskia Groneberg* documents these surprisingly revealing flora


*Büropflanze* (Office Plant) is a study of German office flora. The bits and pieces of nature brought to the workplace, almost unconsciously, seem to reveal a lot about the basic needs of human beings when placed into an inorganic, standardised environment, where everything present is supposed to be functional.

Even when provided by a company as decor, the office plant is allowed to thrive and blossom without opposition: a tiny bit of anarchy amid the rigid clockwork, something amorphous among the geometric forms, a spark of life within the mechanisms of control.

In contrast to holiday postcards, family photographs or other attempts to personalise impersonal office architecture, plants change and grow – sometimes utterly unnoticed, sometimes under close observation and loving care – up to the ceiling, around a heater or encroaching through blinds. Plants can only be controlled to a certain extent, yet they are utterly dependent: they must be watered and cared for to survive in an arid and artificial habitat.

From the mailroom to the chief executive's office, you will find the same robust species transferred from subtropical regions, adapted to life at room temperature, to dry spells and flooding. The close relationship between humans and plants can last for many years – sometimes the duration of an entire career.

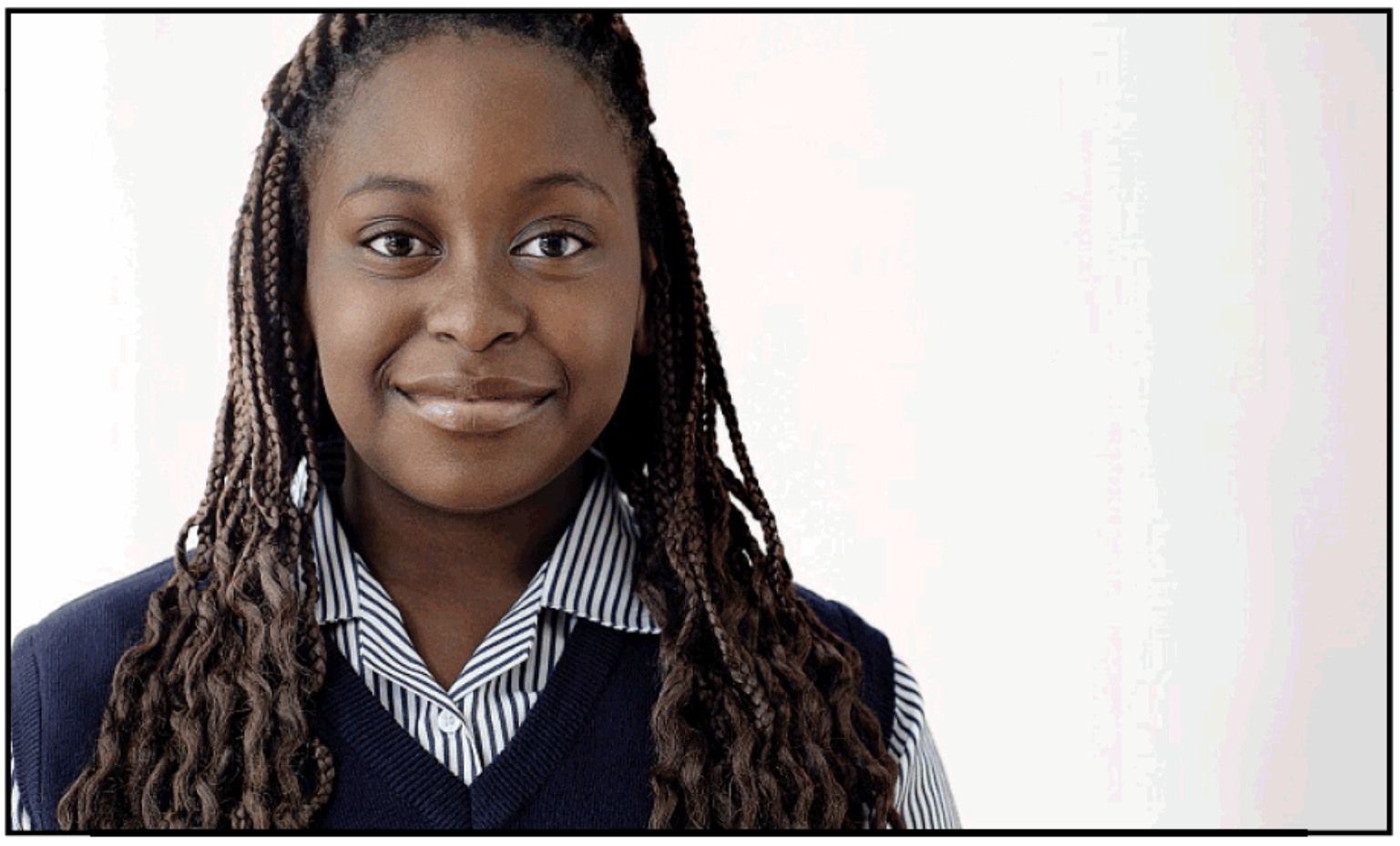
Some people are emotional about their plants – maybe because they were a present from a former colleague or saved from the trash and nursed back to health, or just because they have lived with them for years. Studies have found our brains relax when we look at plants and that sick people heal quicker when they have a tree outside their hospital window. So office plants might indeed have a healthy side to them. Still, for many they are really no more than a room decoration – and architects often strongly dislike them in their buildings precisely because of that.

I don't have any plants in my studio but I own several houseplants now, which I didn't have when I started the project; it makes me comfortable, having plants at home. That said, I should probably get a studio plant soon. FT

*"Büropflanze" (Office Plant) is published by Edition Taube, €32*

**'The office plant is allowed to thrive without opposition: a spark of life within the mechanisms of control'**

# Future leaders start here.



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I feel nervous about entering the corporate environment, but I will not let that change my attitude toward success as a Black woman.
— Melanie, 21

# Similar to me

Using photographic narratives and video testimonials, visual artist *Endia Beal* explores the intersection of race and gender in corporate America

I had the opportunity to intern in a corporate environment. My space had no windows and it was always cold. I worked in a cubicle and I had to dress up every day. It just wasn't for me. I prefer to be in an open space with sunlight and the flexibility to wear my own style.
— Sakeya, 21

Corporate America is intimidating, but my hope to succeed allows it to also be promising. I feel like I will have to fight twice as hard to exceed my competition for respect and wage.
— Sabrina, 23

I join the band of minority women in corporate America as a faceless heroine. I believe corporate has let go of its service toward humanity and I feel obligated to supply it. I've noticed that big-name corporations are making an effort to equal the playing field by hiring minority and female leaders... It's an indication that there are highly skilled players on the bench ready to be called into play.
— Katrina, 23

**Corporate America is already geared toward the success of men in the business. So as a woman – a woman of colour at that – I always have to be better than the best even to be considered for the same opportunities. The way I wear my hair, my posture, and my outfit do not define who I am or what I know. They externalise my confidence. – Taylor, 21**

ABOVE AND PREVIOUS PAGES: PHOTOGRAPHS AND QUOTATIONS FROM THE SERIES 'AM I WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?', 2012–2017

OPPOSITE: TOP AND MIDDLE IMAGES: STILLS AND DIALOGUE FROM 'OFFICE SCENE', 2012. SINGLE-CHANNEL VIDEO, 3:30.
BOTTOM IMAGE: 'CO-WORKERS', 2012

I remember it like it was yesterday.

My white, female supervisor and I met in her cubicle. She explained my deadlines for the week, then mentioned a conversation she'd had with her own boss. "I was talking to Paul the other day and he loves your hair. He wants to know what it feels like," she laughed.

Paul and I barely spoke. Yet here he was, at work, talking about me. Not about my skills or my performance on the job. He was talking about touching me. About my hair, and his desire to touch it.

At that time, I was studying photography as a graduate student at the Yale School of Art and, like most students, I needed a job to make extra money. After searching online, I found a student position in IT. Although I had limited experience (if any) working with code or websites, I was confident I could learn.

In preparing myself as a candidate for the position, I knew my cultural identity would be questioned based on white standards of professionalism. I had learned from experience that if I did not mask or downplay certain aspects of my culture, I would not be hired. An employer's bias is often evident as soon as I walk in. It is a case of the "similar-to-me" effect. In other words, they stare at my afro and say to themselves, "She is not similar to me." I am considered militant or angry before I even speak and am asked insulting questions about my education and experience, as if there is no possible way *I* could have *this* résumé.

And so I followed the guidelines of professionalism that I had been taught by my parents. My mother and father endured racism and prejudice in the workplace and, like many parents, they wanted to protect and prevent their child from experiencing the same degree of discrimination. For the interview, I straightened my hair, wore cream-coloured dress pants, a white button-down shirt with a pointed collar and low heels. My makeup was minimal, my earrings were small, my nail colour was neutral.

When I walked off the elevator to go to my interview, I felt as muted as the sea of cubicles that greeted me. However, I was tired of getting rejected and this method of presentation always worked – it was necessary to get the job. The conversation was brief and I started work the following week.

The faces I encountered in the office were predominantly

white and male. Most of the men ignored me: they did not look in my direction. I realised there were only a few Black people on my floor. No matter how much I tried to fit in, I was othered. So most of the time, after receiving my assignments from my supervisor, I would leave and work from home.

Then, one day, I made a decision and wore my natural afro to work. Although it was a small gesture, it was liberating – I was breaking an antiquated tradition. The Black security guard did a double-take and smiled when I walked into the building. My heart raced in the elevator. I knew my new look would be scrutinised and I was right. The stares from my white colleagues were unwavering. No one said a word. They just looked, transfixed, with wide eyes. Naturally, although I was finally seen, I felt uncomfortable.

As the weeks progressed, I grew comfortable in my discomfort and was determined not to be alone in that feeling. Instead of perpetuating awkward silence, I wanted to have difficult conversations with my colleagues about diversity and inclusion in our workplace. I needed them to understand what it felt like to be objectified.

For the first time in my seven years of making photographs, I decided to turn the camera on myself and be the subject of my work. I would use my own uncomfortable experiences to expose a corporate system – one I'd encountered more than once – that was never designed for women who look like me. What began then resulted nearly 10 years later in these photographs. ▶

**'I wanted to have conversations with my colleagues about diversity and inclusion in our workplace. I needed them to understand what it felt like to be objectified'**





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: 'BETH', 2012; 'CHRISTINA', 2013; 'LYNN', 2012; ELLEN, 2012 FROM THE SERIES "CAN I TOUCH IT?"

**'The portraits pushed the othering, the awkwardness and the judgments stemming from racial and gender biases into the open'**

The art we made, including the series "Am I What You're Looking For?", "Can I Touch It?" and the video "Office Scene", created a psychological safe place to have honest conversations about the experiences I'd had. From the white women with traditional Black hairstyles in "Can I Touch It?" to the young Black women entering corporate America in "Am I What You're Looking For?", the portraits address barriers women of colour endure in the corporate sector. It also pushed the othering, the awkwardness and the judgments stemming from racial and gender biases into the open. My white colleagues were often uncomfortable while being photographed, yet they began to empathise.

All of this work comes together in my first book, *Performance Review*. On the surface, employee reviews evaluate a person's skill set, acknowledge accomplishments and, in theory, provide insight leading to new goals for the employee. However, they also judge our ability to follow an unwritten script about how to look, talk and behave. We are constantly being watched. And we can be penalised for our very existence, depending on who is watching.

We are all at different stages in our diversity maturity. A commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion training throughout the corporate sector is one important effort; how we each talk around the proverbial water cooler is another. My work aims to foster conversation and realisations in both environments. We are more similar to each other than we may appear to be at first glance. FT

*Edited extract from "Performance Review" ($50), published by Minor Matters, minormattersbooks.com*

# Out of office Emma Jacobs

ILLUSTRATION BY SONNY ROSS

Last year was all about the new normal. This year, thanks to vaccines, we'll have to retire the new normal and get used to a new new normal. Which, confusingly, will bear some similarities to the old normal. Now we need to determine which parts of the new normal we will incorporate into the new new normal so it has the best of both normals. Keep up!

The great work-from-home experiment was a chance to re-examine white-collar life, although the pandemic distorts the results. The home-office laboratory has been far from pristine. It has been cluttered with children in need of home-schooling or flatmates who cannot flee their bedroom-office to take refuge with their laptops at a café. Those living alone have found it hard to offset the solitude with trips to the pub or a friend's home.

By my estimate, there have been three stages of WFHIAP (working from home in a pandemic). In the first, fuelled by adrenaline, everything was novel and we were lulled by the idea that this was a communal experience. Back then, Zoom-bombing cats and toddlers were charming and we soldiered on 24/7 because we believed this would be over soon. How naive.

After those adrenalised highs came the amorphous blob when days became an unending blur of work and home life. I realised that I had entered this malaise when I approached the manager of an after-school club and asked to see my son, as if I'd arrived at the reception of a glistening skyscraper to meet a CEO. The manager looked baffled. "Don't you want to take him home?"

Then, as 2020 wound to a close, came the I'm-knackered-I-just-want-it-to-end phase.

So, based on the topsy-turvy WFHIAP months, having spoken to hundreds of people and written countless pieces on last year's new work normal, here is what I'd like for the new new normal in 2021.

**Telephone calls.** I never used to appreciate the phone. Between calling people for interviews as part of my job, I opted for WhatsApp or email. That was until I became overwhelmed by Zoomageddon. This audio-visual overload came with the added horror of trying to pretend you were not watching yourself while also grappling with the horror of watching yourself. Then there were the embarrassed waves while everyone sought their "end meeting" buttons. Zoom forced me to reappraise the simple phone, which cuts through the endless email chains and WhatsApp pinging. I'm calling it now: telephone calls are in.

**'Zoom forced me to reappraise the simple phone, which cuts through the endless email chains and WhatsApp' pinging'**

**Walks with colleagues.** I was always suspicious of walking meetings, believing their only purpose was to have difficult conversations while avoiding your interlocutor's gaze. Or making sure that any meltdowns were away from watchful co-workers. But social-distancing rules demanded some creativity about meeting in person. Being out in a park or winding through hidden streets proved more energising than coffee and a companionable way to talk about ideas, problems and gossip.

**The office kitchen.** In recent years, employers have spent a lot of money on spaces where employees could come together to collaborate. I don't know how many serendipitous ideas I get while stewing a tea bag but I enjoy bumping into colleagues.

**An end to presenteeism.** In truth, I've been lucky not to have managers who raised an eyebrow if I was late or needed to leave early. Yet I'd internalised the idea that home-working meant I was slacking off – even though I would work harder at the kitchen table. I won't feel guilty about it in the future and I hope this experience has taught managers to trust their workers.

**Lipstick.** I know some women have been wearing a full face of make-up for Zoom calls; some men even put on a jacket. However, I am not one of them. A recent nadir was appearing on video conference straight from a run looking bedraggled. I felt ashamed. I need the gentle pressure of part-time office work to remind me of grooming standards. I'm incapable of upholding them myself.

**Weekends.** I want them back. I've always done bits of work out of hours but there is nothing like the physical office for creating boundaries between work and home. A small part of me will always inwardly punch the air like a tinpot David Brent from *The Office* when I leave the office at the end of the week. In short, I need the office – at least some of the time – so I can walk away. FT

*Emma Jacobs is the FT's work and careers columnist*

# PARTY PEOPLE

ALEX PRAGER, HOLIDAY PARTY, 2020 © ALEX PRAGER, PHOTO COURTESY ALEX PRAGER STUDIO AND LEHMANN MAUPIN, NEW YORK, HONG KONG, SEOUL AND LONDON

If you are one of those who rejoiced at the cancellation of last year's office Christmas shindig, you are not alone. "Farewell, Work Holiday Parties", LA-based artist Alex Prager's installation at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, scythes through the grotesquerie, misbehaviour and boozy bonhomie of the work do. Will a return to offices in 2021 mean these parties are revived? Or has Covid-19 put a (justified) stake through their heart?

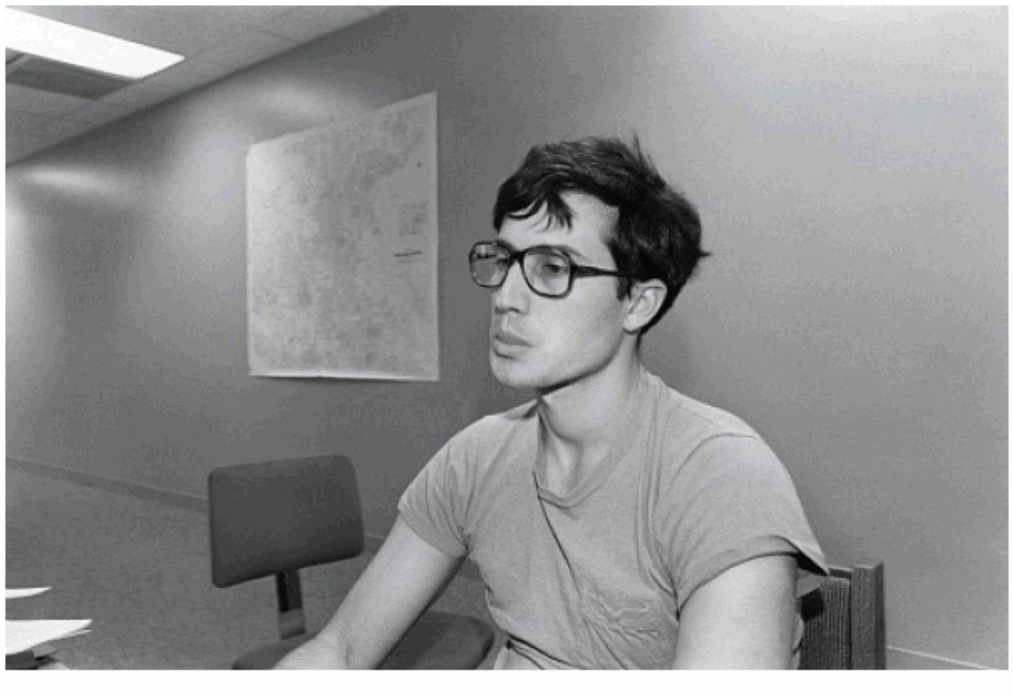
# GLIMPSE

# INTO THE

# FUTURE

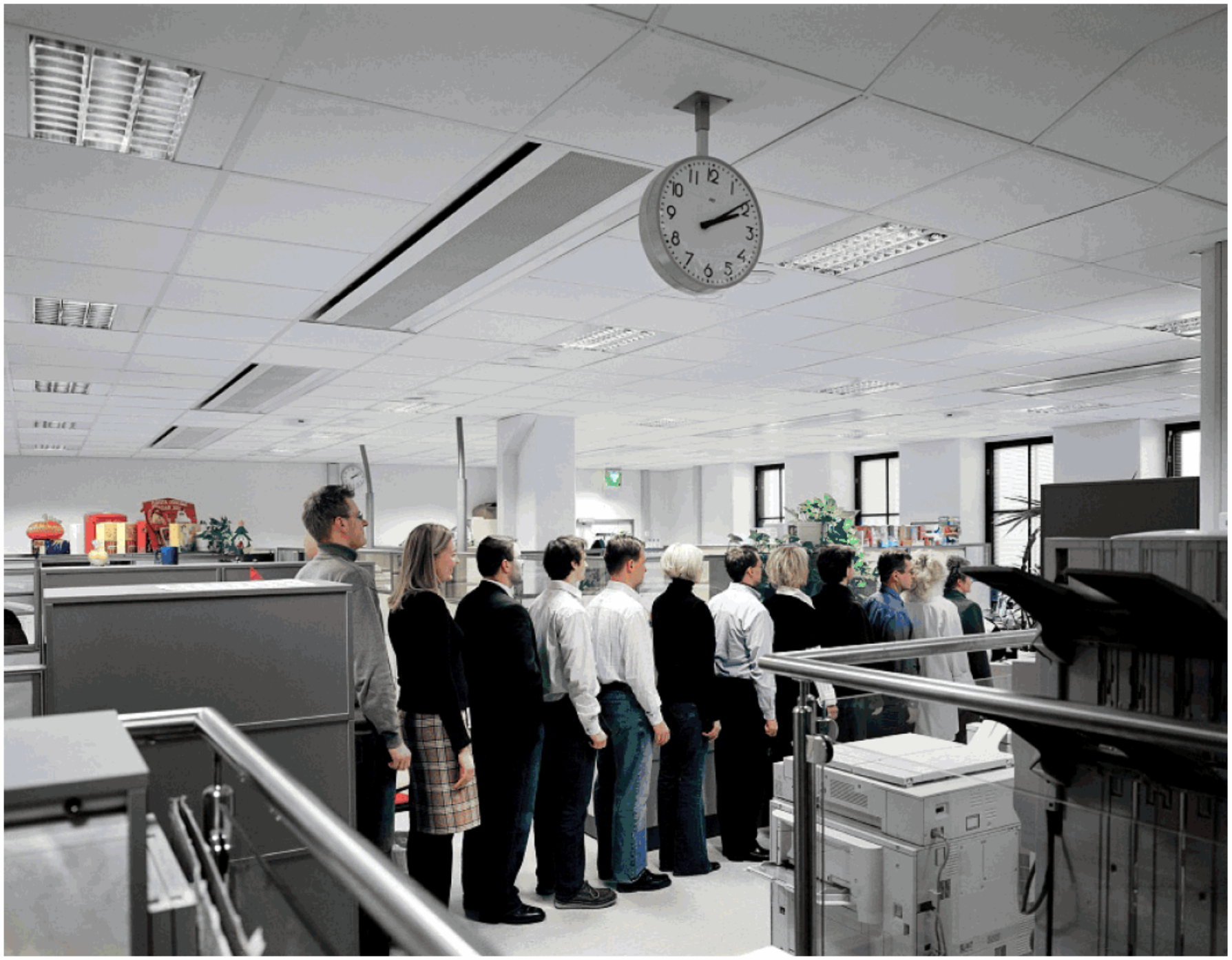
Photographs by *Lee Friedlander*

My working project was named "Changing Technology": in 1985-86, I chose to photograph people working at computers as these ubiquitous machines seemed to be the vehicle for that change. The pictures were made in the environs of Route 128, a loop road around Boston, which at the time was considered a north-eastern Silicon Valley.





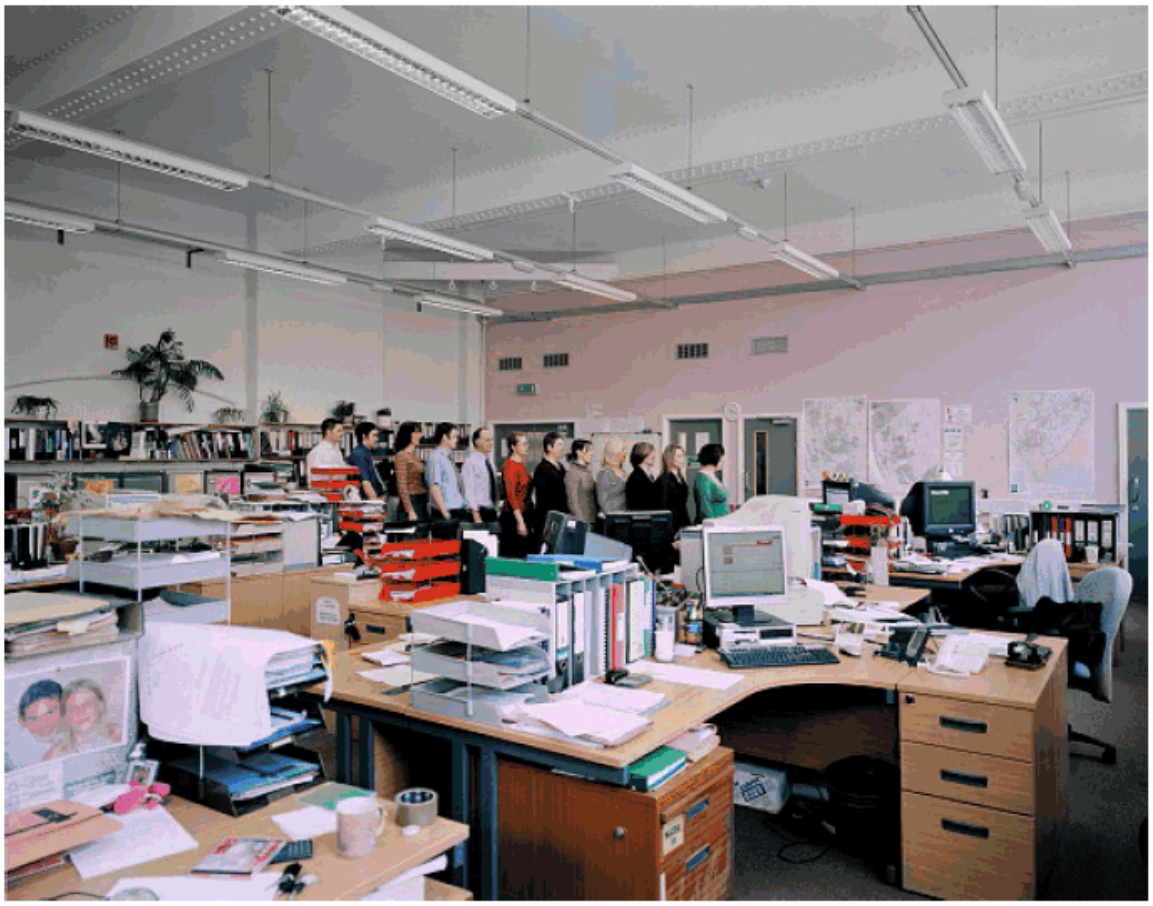
'AT WORK', BOSTON 1985-86



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: 'LINE OF HEIGHT',
TURKU, FINLAND, 2002

# Fine lines

*Minna Kantonen*'s photographs of office workers in height order reveal and challenge the complex ways we establish hierarchies, both in the workplace and in society at large ▸



TOP: 'LINE OF HEIGHT', BARROW-IN-FURNESS, UK, 2005
BOTTOM: 'LINE OF HEIGHT', LONDON, UK, 2002

**'We can spend a third of our day in the office, yet the spaces are generic and depersonalising'**

Between 2002 and 2005, I visited offices and asked workers to form a line of height from shortest to tallest, which I then photographed.

At the time, I had been reflecting on the ways we are identified from an early age by characteristics such as height. I had been the second-tallest person in my class throughout primary school, towering over most of the boys, always at the end of a line formed by height.

By taking office workers who are usually arranged by carefully defended subtleties of income or status and lining them up by height alone, we have no idea whether it is a part-time contractor or the company director in first or last place. It is easy to make assumptions based on appearance. We might assume the person at the end of the line, often a male, to be the company director, when it might be the shortest, often a woman.

In some images there is a visible gap in the line, which might reveal an office hierarchy. In others the line does not quite follow the order of height because of personal politics; some workers stand on tiptoes, perhaps subconsciously trying to appear taller, but they forget by the time I take the photograph and sink back down.

The work environments range from county councils and education welfare bodies to media companies and hospitals' administrative blocks, yet all share similar cluttered spaces or sparse, brightly lit factory floors. The decor, lighting and ceilings seem to follow a formula, as does the appearance of some of the workers.

Arranging office workers by line of height was my attempt to capture the strange play between institutions such as the office and individuals. We can spend a third of our day in the office, yet the spaces are generic and depersonalising. I wanted to question how we establish hierarchies in the workplace and more broadly in society as a whole. FT

# Out of office James Rebanks

ILLUSTRATION BY SONNY ROSS

My office has no walls. This is a great design feature because we have amazing views. I see the snow showers sweep down the valley and the sun rise and fall. Red squirrels, badgers, foxes and deer take a shortcut through my office, and in summer the swallows swoop around me as I work. I feel the wind through my hair and the rain on my cheeks and, yes, on good days it makes me "feel alive". My office is the valley of Matterdale in the Lake District, or more accurately the fields of our 185-acre farm on the south-facing side of the valley.

I am a farmer. Having no walls to your office is a less great design feature when it is lashing sleet sideways down the valley. There is no roof to my office either, except sometimes clouds, and that's a mixed blessing too. I just got frozen planting trees with my friend Danny and am thawing out as I write this.

When you work outside, life is very seasonal and weather matters in a visceral way. My hands swell like an old man's in winter from the constant cold and wet. But there is an upside, of course. A few times a year, when the sun is shining and the ground is dry, I lie down and just stare up at the sky, at the passing clouds or the swifts screaming as they chase each other over the fellsides, or at a peregrine falcon or buzzard swirling around on the thermals, high, high above in the patches of blue.

I worked in a proper office once. It was the most miserable time of my life. I'd peer out of the window longingly, feeling sick, and I filled my time by working as hard as I could to take my mind off it, or flirting with Gemma who sat at the reception desk, or swapping notes on music with Mike at the water cooler. I have never been so tired and jaded in my life as doing 10-plus hours a day in an air-conditioned glass box, bookended by sweaty commutes.

Working in that office years ago made me bitter. I started resenting my wife because she seemed to love being at home with our young children, and I felt like I was being sent to a life of dullness to pay the bills, instead of doing the stuff I dreamt of doing (try telling your mortgage adviser you want to be a writer if you want to see eyes roll). I couldn't wait to get back to where I felt I belonged (and where my mood improved). Somehow, eventually, I did, but it took years.

**'Even in our remote valley there is a kind of fellowship of the fields. We have a water-cooler equivalent in our roadside chats'**

These days I work from home, something that means lockdown hasn't really affected what I do. There was no exhausting commute in the first place: I pull on my boots, exit the front door and I'm at work.

Work on the farm often changes by the hour because the weather and seasons are always changing. Maybe that's the nicest thing about traditional outside work: you feel part of a flow of human effort that dwarfs you.

The other great thing about working here is that we are surrounded by beauty and nature; this valley never looks the same twice. The light shifts, or a skein of geese passes over, or the wind lifts the beech leaves and scatters them like giant copper sequins around me. There wasn't much beauty when I worked in a real office: my desk faced a wall, and the only window I could see faced the air-conditioning units on the building opposite.

Often working outside is lonelier than working in an office, but even in our remote valley there is a kind of fellowship of the fields. We have a water-cooler equivalent in our roadside chats – it is not unusual for our road to be jammed with Land Rovers or pick-ups as we farmers swap grumbles on the weather or the price of sheep or gossip about who is sleeping with who in the local village.

Some things are similar: it takes a lot of paperwork and bureaucracy to run a modern farm business. And yes, this is really boring – all jobs have their dull bits. But the best bit, and it has always been the best bit for me, is that I am my own boss.

My working life can be painted as mindless rural drudgery or as romantic idyll in a pastoral landscape, but the truth is it is a whole range of good, bad and mediocre experiences, just like yours.

My experiences in 2020 have taught me to see the upside of my office, but also how precarious it is because we are connected to the rest of Britain, to how people shop, cook, eat and, yes, vote – we live or die depending on whether society values what we do. Now I must get back to my office because the cows need some hay. FT

*James Rebanks is the author of the bestselling memoir 'English Pastoral'*

# Home truths

One of the things that fascinates me most about working from home is how the boundaries blur between the personal and the professional. The first example that came to mind was clothes: we have formal outfits – the ones we'd show during video calls – and comfortable ones, those we'd never show to our workmates and bosses. This was the first concept I began to explore in this series, "Homeffice", but I soon discovered that it was far from the only case of boundaries blurring. Starting a few centimetres outside the frame of the webcam, each person creates their own world, right on their desk. In the images here, I photographed the secrets that we all have around us at home: personal items, books, food, drinks, tobacco and even pets crowding our "desks". If there is something good about working from home, I'd say it is being able to create those little personal environments during the working day.
*Albert Bonsfills*


**Lorena Lanza, 29**
**Specialist in music education and cello teacher**

"Doing online music classes does not allow me to enjoy the emotional part – which is very important when connecting with the interpretation – so much."

**Albert Rius, 35**
**Remote personal banking manager**

"Teleworking has been very enriching personally and professionally. I became very aware of all the unproductive moments of day-to-day office work. Not being used to this new way of working and having work tools in the same daily living spaces has often made it difficult to finish work on time."

**Mirjam Ziegler, 33**
**Writer/customer service**

"I work as a writer in the morning and in customer service in the afternoon. I don't miss the ping-pong table that I never used because I had no time. I do not want to get back [to how it was]. I enjoy cooking. A different life has grown in my head."

**‘Starting a few centimetres outside the frame of the webcam, each person creates their own world, right on their desk’**

STYLING: ROXANE MERCERAT

**Mónica Stalio, 46**
**Senior operations supervisor**

“For me, working at home is the best (and only) good thing that this pandemic has brought: I have more free time, I work more calmly and I am more efficient. I enjoy my home and every second of break time.”

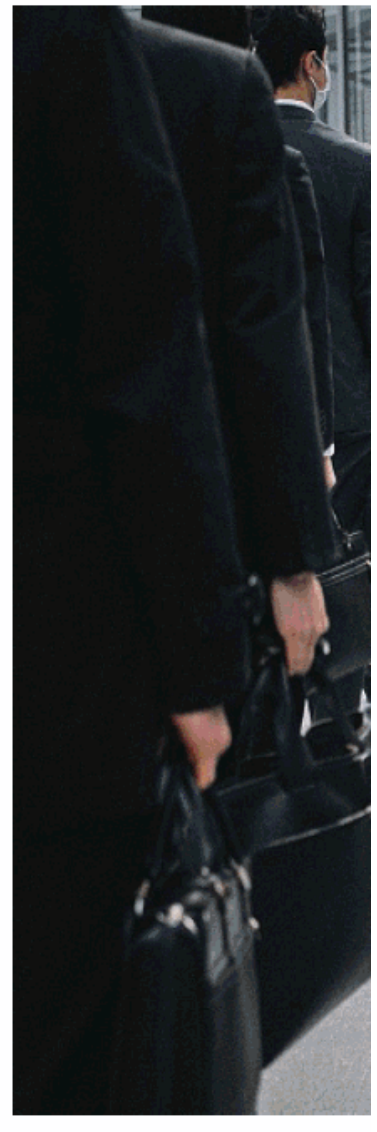
**Clarence Bekker, 51**
**Musician**

“My experience with working from home is mixed. It’s very easy to entertain people all over the world with songs from my lounge, but I still miss the warmth of the physical presence. Online concerts also have a lack of ambience and audience presence, but this is what it is.”

RIGHT: A 2011 ISSUE OF THE JAPANESE MAGAZINE AERA DEDICATED TO GRADUATE JOB-HUNTING

FAR RIGHT: A 1970S BUSINESS MAGAZINE OFFERING TIPS TO YOUNG JOB-SEEKERS – THE HEADLINES INCLUDE 'HOW TO GET A JOB EVEN WITH POOR GRADES' AND 'THE COMPANIES THAT ACCEPT FEMALE STUDENTS'





# 'Under pressure'

In Japan's spring job-hunting season, half a million students compete for places at the country's top companies. Shocked by the anxiety of many of them, Tokyo-based photographer *Hiroshi Okamoto* decided to chronicle his best friend's struggles

ABOVE: THE MESSAGE OKAMOTO RECEIVED FROM HIS BEST FRIEND SAYING THAT HE WANTED TO DIE – 'HE'D NEVER SAID THAT KIND OF THING BEFORE, EVEN AS A JOKE. THIS WAS THE START OF MY PROJECT'

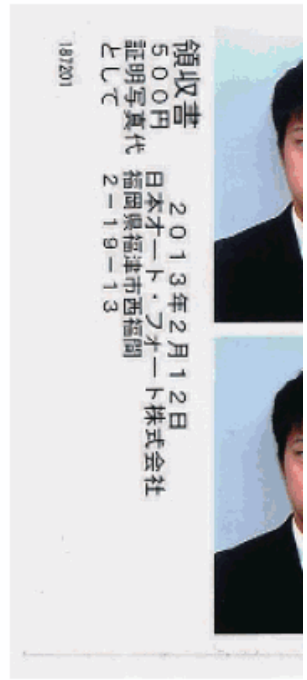
I want to die."

In February 2013, Yo Toshino, my best friend at university, who was job-hunting at the time, sent me that email.

Every year in Japan, more than half a million students participate in the springtime job-hunting season, hoping to be hired by newspapers, ad agencies, banks, trading houses, tech companies and, for those who want a more stable life, the civil service. There is as much anxiety as excitement for those in this frantic game.

The recruitment process – known as *shūkatsu* – has a series of steps. First, you go to job fairs and seminars held by employers; this is not officially part of the process, though many companies want to see candidates demonstrate their interest at this early stage. Then, after making your applications, you have online tests: mathematics and essay-writing. Finally, you have several rounds of interviews – either individually or as a group. ▶

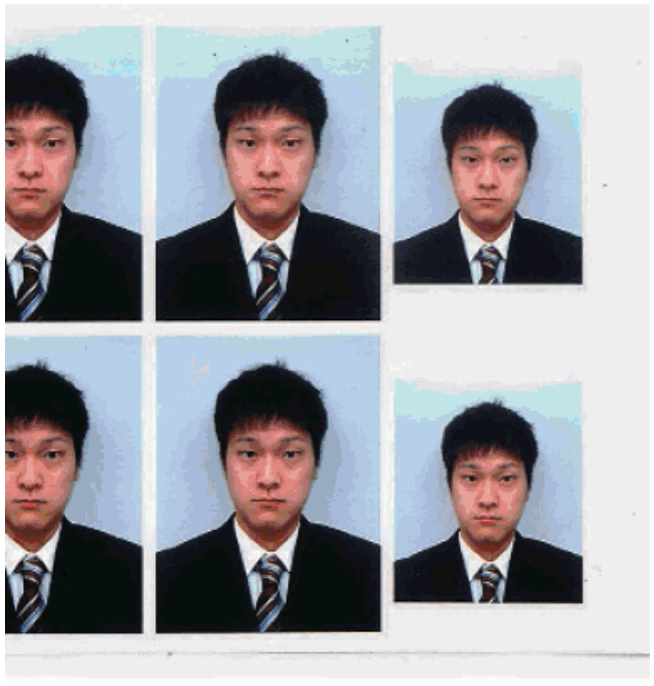


LEFT: STUDENTS QUEUEING AT A GRADUATE JOB FAIR IN TOKYO

BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT: ADVERTISEMENTS BY PHOTO STUDIOS AIMED AT YOUNG JOB-SEEKERS, WHO MUST INCLUDE THEIR PHOTOGRAPHS WITH THEIR CVS – MANY FEEL A PROFESSIONAL PORTRAIT WILL COUNT IN THEIR FAVOUR

BELOW CENTRE: OKAMOTO'S FRIEND YO TASHINO INITIALLY HAD HIS CV SHOTS TAKEN AT A PHOTO BOOTH, BUT 'EVENTUALLY HAD THEM DONE AT A PHOTO STUDIO'



**'We can't change the system wholesale – the employees who run it today benefited from (or at least survived) the process'**

LEFT: OKAMOTO'S FLATMATES (YO TOSHINO TO THE RIGHT) GET READY FOR A RECRUITMENT FAIR, DONNING THE MALE-GRADUATE JOB-SEEKER'S UNIFORM OF BLACK SUIT AND TIE

BELOW LEFT: THE RURAL TRANQUILLITY OF THE OITA REGION OF SOUTHERN JAPAN, WHERE TOSHINO GREW UP, CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH THE SPRAWL OF TOKYO (BELOW), WHERE HE DESPERATELY SOUGHT WORK

◀ I think most people believe this system is too rigid, but we can't change it wholesale – the employees who run it today benefited from (or at least survived) the process at the start of their career, and many members of society also got their jobs through it.

*Shūkatsu* is so important because these are jobs for life. According to a popular saying in Japan, your first job hunt should be your final one. This means that if you fail, your life seems already over. Many students apply to 50, 60 or even 100 companies, and some who do not get a job at all feel it must be because they are worthless. Families, friends, universities, partners, communities and society as a whole pile on this pressure.

Despite an official decision by the business lobby Keidanren, which created *shūkatsu*, to abolish its schedule and guidelines, I don't believe we will see immediate changes – Japanese companies' recruitment policies will remain as strict. And so many students who take part in the system seem in their own way, ultimately, to be satisfied with it. FT

*hiroshi-okamoto.com*

**'According to a popular saying, your first job hunt should be your final one. This means that if you fail, your life seems already over'**

# Out of office Joanne Bennett-McNally

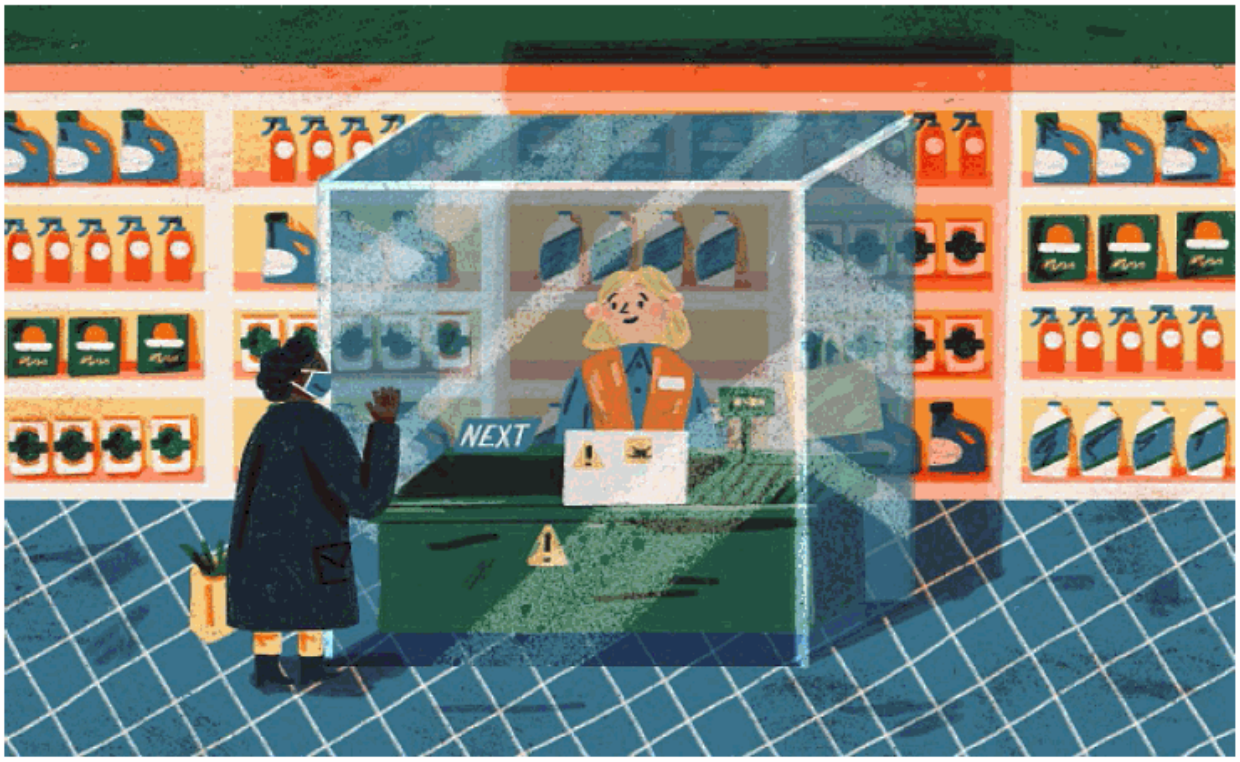



ILLUSTRATION BY SONNY ROSS

I was working in the supermarket the night that Boris Johnson announced we were first going into lockdown, and I remember the entire store going quiet. As the manager, I was sitting there and thinking, "What's that going to mean for us? What will that look like for our store?" The things he was describing seemed surreal at the time but I remember thinking, "This is real. This is happening now."

I knew we had to talk to our customers and make sure they knew we were still the same people. The business might be changing and the world might be changing around us, but we, as a store team, were still there for them.

We started to see people who were scared, customers nervously coming in with face masks. I remember the first couple of customers walking in wearing them and everyone staring.

The fact that we are so close to customers – you do get to know them almost like family – meant we could reach out to those who were living alone or not getting visits from their family. My customer service manager came in and said, "What about this guy Jerry? He lives on his own." We cobbled together some food and took it to his house.

What I tried to do every day was go about and speak to the team. We got badges to say we were key workers, which really helped motivate everyone. It was almost like a wartime effort; people wanted to know how they could contribute. And if someone was really worried, we could put them in a back area, not too customer-facing.

Of course, I was nervous, I have a family. But when you go into work, it keeps you occupied and you don't really get time to sit there and dwell on things. Your customers are there. Other than the face masks, the queueing and the hand sanitiser, it felt a bit normal. Going into work kept me very sane.

But things had to change. In any supermarket, you are a very close-knit group of people, you're going for tea together, having dinner around the table together, walking on the shop floor together, going into meetings. So because of social distancing, the strangest thing about all of this for me is not being so close to the people that I'm normally very close to.

We still have meetings but they're done at a distance. I always took photographs around the store to celebrate success – when someone had done something really good, you'd stand next to each other, you'd have your arm around someone, you'd be in a photograph frame in the office. Now we have to be a bit further away from each other, but we still celebrate success.

**'It weighed heavily on me just how important my role is, as a store manager, to keep people upbeat, to keep people talking'**

It weighed heavily on me just how important my role is, as a store manager, to keep people upbeat, to keep people talking, to keep communication strong. Out of everything, I would say it's taught me to listen really hard and respond even harder. Get round the team, talk to them, make sure they're OK, even harder and more than I've ever done before.

In the middle of the crisis, I went from full-time manager in the Widnes store to part-time manager in St Helens, much nearer my home. My daughter was starting school and she could only stay until quarter past four, so I needed to balance how I do this great job and how I can be a great mum. When the opportunity came up for me to go to flexible working, I was very happy with that, but I was gutted to leave Widnes because the team is like a family.

When we came out of full lockdown and went back to the lighter restrictions of tier 2, you started to see more regulars coming in, it was like a welcome home: "Come back in! Hello, how are you? How have you been?" They love that sense of normality.

We had a customer who came in every week but who had never, ever said a word to us. We always said hello and he kept his head down, kept on going. I remember in the week where lockdown commenced, as usual I said "Morning," and I thought I'd get a bit of a wave. He stopped and looked at me, and then he said, "What do you think about all this lockdown?" Then we started talking. It turned out he lived on his own, he had no company and he just opened up. And I remember thinking, "I'm so glad we didn't give up on that customer."

It was a defining moment for me because I thought, actually, that person reached out to you in the middle of all this – that proves how big this is and what part we can play in it. FT

*Joanne Bennett-McNally is manager of Morrisons in St Helens. As told to Josh Spero*

# Team spirit

*Jessica Bernard*'s photographs show zones of grey conformity transformed into absurd worlds for team-building activities

My father was bullied in his office job. He later developed schizophrenia and never went back to work. As part of his illness he suffered delusions, and he lived the later part of his working life in a confused reality. He was assigned an employee number beginning "007" and believed himself to be James Bond, working in the office undercover.

When he was sectioned in the 1980s, he thought he was Kenny Everett, the British comedian popular at the time. He believed he was being escorted to the psychiatric hospital to put on a show – until he was held down and sedated.

In 2013, I started documenting team-building activities. Within the corporate workspace, ubiquitous grey conference rooms became arenas for play. Obstacle courses and oversized board games were installed in office blocks. Pillars were dressed in colourful bunting.

Over time I have drawn the link between these photographs and my father's experiences. In these images, I see a physical manifestation of his disorientation. People are stretched, changed and forced to encounter multiple versions of themselves.

The workplace thrusts them into an absurd, artificial new world. They suddenly leave a state of greyness and conformity, of rules and procedures, in which they are presentable ambassadors of their organisations. They have to be a different person altogether. To lose their inhibitions, to be expressive and physical, to paint, to dance.

Suited for work, they play bongo drums. They battle to build the tallest spaghetti tower. They wait patiently in *Monopoly* jail. FT

**‘People are stretched, changed and forced to encounter multiple versions of themselves. They have to be a different person. To lose their inhibitions, to be expressive and physical’**

# *Wrap up warm for an Ice Age Adventure!*

**AQUILA Magazine** is a big hit in the world of children's publishing: its thought-provoking topics are so well researched and written you will probably enjoy reading the articles yourself.

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**April:** a visit to **ANCIENT EGYPT** and the River Nile makes for a very popular topic – so not to be missed!

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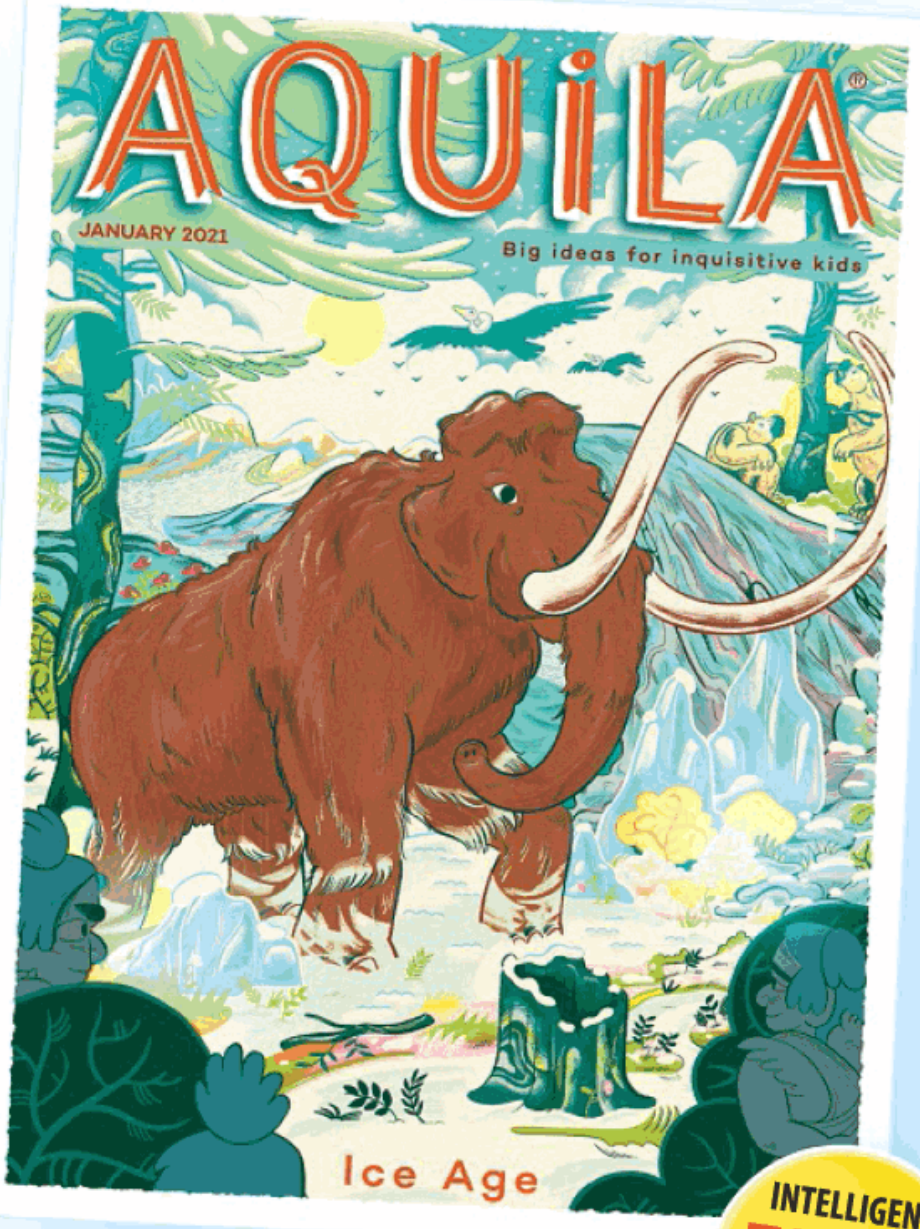


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RICHARD ROBINSON – BRIGHTON SCIENCE FESTIVAL

# Jancis Robinson
# Wine

## What's really in your glass?

It has always seemed strange that, while labels tell us every little detail of what goes into processed food, we are told next to nothing about what goes into wine.

I raised this with a UK wine trade official back in the 1980s and got a very frosty reception indeed, as though I was letting the side down by raising such a consumerist issue. I was given the party line that it would be impossible because of the difficulty of distinguishing between ingredients and processing agents such as finings which, in theory but not always in practice, don't remain in the wine.

Others have argued that winemaking techniques vary from vintage to vintage and that it would be impossibly expensive to create different back labels every year. Some wine producers have made the slightly alarming argument that consumers would be put off by the information and, besides, there wouldn't be room to list everything. Others have claimed that there would be too little interest in the precise composition of wines to justify all the effort.

One has to admire the combined forces of the world's wine trade for having dodged the niggling demands of ingredient labelling for so long. But we live in a world of allergies, intolerances and sensitivities, and today's consumers expect transparency.

Warning labels about the harmful effects of alcohol on the unborn became mandatory in the US in the 1989. In 2005, came the now-ubiquitous "contains sulphites", an acknowledgement that the sulphur compounds naturally present in wine – and also widely added to keep wine and all sorts of other fruit products stable and fresh – can adversely affect asthmatics. UK supermarket Waitrose apparently receives four or five queries about sulphites each week.


As imagined by Leon Edler

### Those who do spell out what's in their wine

One of the first wine producers to list ingredients was Randall Grahm of California, when he owned Bonny Doon Vineyard.

Quite a few natural wine producers are proud to write simply "fermented grape juice" on their labels.

- All wines on sale in Co-op stores
- Ridge Vineyards, California
- Atlas Wine Co, California
- Ampelos Cellars, California
- Omero Cellars, Oregon
- Shinn Estate Vineyards, Long Island
- Westwell Wines, England

But generally those who produce wine have been rather out of sync with those who buy it or might buy it. Younger consumers, in particular, are seeking out much more information about a product that has historically provided so few clues as to its contents.

Last July, film star Cameron Diaz really got up wine producers' noses when she launched what was described as "clean wine". Avaline organic wine is distinguished mainly by its marketing. According to its website, it was created as a reaction to the fact that "there's no obligation... to name any of the more than 70 additives that are used in the winemaking process

**'The world's wine trade has dodged the niggling demands of ingredient labelling'**

to alter the taste, colour, and mouthfeel of what is in your glass".

Responding to this in August, Master of Wine Richard Bampfield, with 40 years' experience in the trade, wrote on sustainablewine.co.uk that the term "clean wine" had "raised hackles amongst the wine fraternity who, understandably, resent the accompanying claim that most other wines must, by definition, be dirty... I too would defend the wine industry against claims that it is dirty but I also believe that much of what goes on is, at best, grubby."

I presume Bampfield is referring to how some commercial brands add colouring, flavouring and sweetening to disguise shortcomings. Yet even certain expensive wines contain added tannin and acid, and sugar was routinely added to most of France's finest wines, to be fermented into alcohol, before the climate could be relied upon to deliver fully ripe ▶

◂ grapes. Today there is no shortage of commercial additives specifically designed to make processes easier or to rescue wine from various afflictions and harmful bacteria.

Nicole Sierra Rolet is another realist. The well-known producer of Chêne Bleu wines in south-east France noted during a recent online debate about wine labelling, "I continue to believe the wine world is very vulnerable to a scandal about the bad stuff that some people have been doing to their wines that will get many more headlines and take us all down with them. This is an accident waiting to happen and we have to act fast."

Fortunately, the EU has a plan – and since Europe is by far the dominant wine-producing and wine-consuming continent, the plan is highly likely to be enacted globally. Since 2017 the Brussels-based CEEV association of European wine producers has been considering the question of wine labelling and has now convinced both its members and EU officials that ingredient listing and nutritional labelling (calories, for example) should be mandatory.

These welcome labelling provisions are part of the new – don't groan – Common Agricultural Policy, with the new rules likely to come into force in 2023.

For the first time for a food or drink product, the ingredients are to be presented digitally rather than spelt out on the label. CEEV is developing a digital platform open to wine producers both in and out of the EU (so even English ones…) that will oversee e-labels for wines to ensure they follow the same protocols wherever they come from.

This all seems pretty sensible to me. Those of us obsessed by the minutiae of how various wines are made and what was used to make them can study these digital extras to our hearts' content while other drinkers won't find their labels too cluttered.

Nutritional information will be spelt out for calorie counters and diabetics apparently. But those with specific allergies will need to get their phones out to read the details of what each wine contains.

I have long thought that the wine trade is far too dilatory about the many people who find specific wines – or sometimes all reds or all whites – disagree with them. The problem is that people who work in wine tend to drink any sort of wine. With unbridled enthusiasm. Which means they tend to be unsympathetic towards what they see as faddiness. As a result, there has been too little research into allergies and intolerances.

Of course by far the most potentially harmful ingredient in wine – all wine, whether "natural", "clean", organic or whatever – is alcohol, but pointing that out here might be seen as letting the side down. FT

*More columns at ft.com/jancis-robinson*

# MY CLASSIC COCKTAIL

## — RYAN CHETIYAWARDANA, 'MR LYAN' BARTENDER AT LYANESS

JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

The martini has a strong claim to be the king of all cocktails. It is the subject of books, films and poetry. From neon signs to emojis, the glass it is most often served in has become the universal symbol of the mixed drink.

Yet there is a certain additional magic to the martini that I think is often overlooked. Many people talk of its elegance and simplicity, its unrivalled status as an aperitif, but what is seldom discussed is just how personal it can be. There are "correct" methods in mixing a daiquiri or julep cocktail, for example, but the martini is more flexible. Stretch the ratios, throw, shake, stir, bottle, pour – and it's still a martini.

The ingredients – gin or vodka, vermouth and/or bitters plus ice – might seem simple, but then the best things often are. And there are endless variables for you to hone quietly at home. Find a combination that suits your palate, your mood and the company you're in and it will sing. Once you find a good one, it's a revelation – and serving the perfect drink to someone you love before dinner is one of life's precious moments.

**House Martini (for two)**

- 110ml Beefeater London Dry Gin
- 30ml Martini Extra Dry Vermouth
- 3 drops orange bitters
- 3 drops white absinthe

Stir well over ice then carefully strain into two small, frozen cocktail glasses. Garnish with nocellara olives

*lyaness.com*



# Games

## A Round on the Links
by James Walton

All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the link, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

**1.** Which RAF jet (right), first used in 1979, was retired from service in 2019?

**2.** What's the most common pub name in Britain?

**3.** Which character speaks the first line of *Macbeth*?

**4.** What's the biggest city in Missouri?

**5.** Whose Grasmere journal for 1802 includes a description of daffodils that "tossed & reeled & danced"?

**6.** In 2019, the artist Max Siedentopf set up a sound installation in the Namib desert playing which band's song "Africa" on a constant loop?

**7.** Which villain was played by Cillian Murphy in *Batman Begins*?

**8.** The editors of which magazine were prosecuted for obscenity at the Old Bailey in 1971 (above)?

**9.** Which TV series was presented by Geoffrey Hayes from 1973 to 1992?

**10.** Sarah Winman was shortlisted for the 2017 Costa Novel Award with which book, whose title differs from her surname by only one letter?

## The Picture Round
by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?

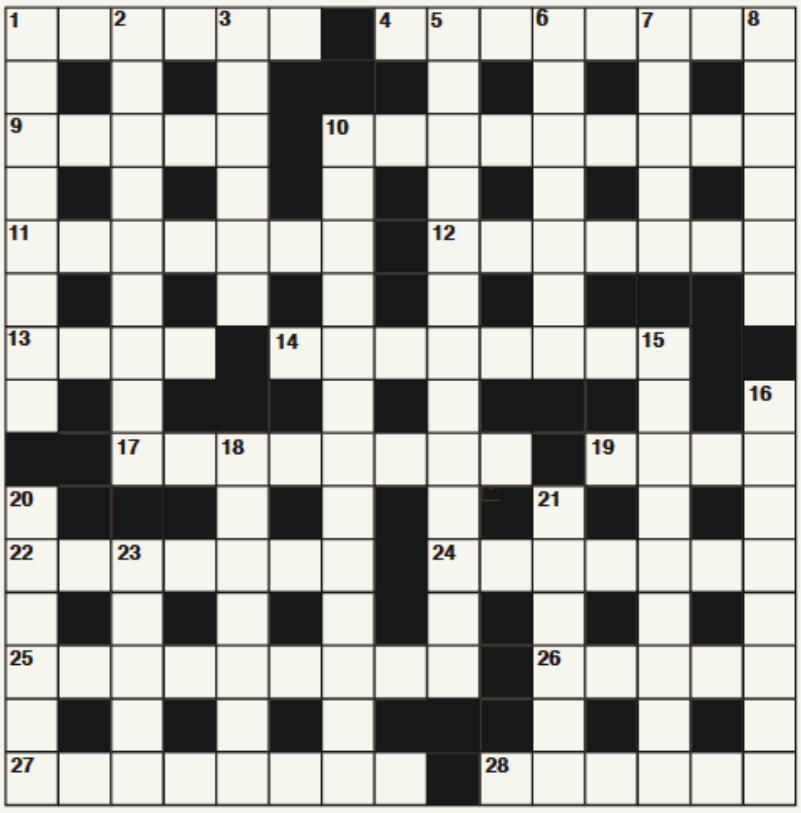
+

= ?

GETTY IMAGES

Answers page 46

## The Crossword
No 520. Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

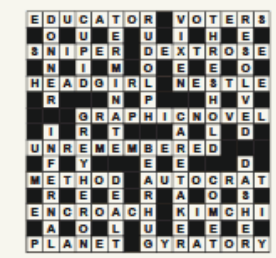
**ACROSS**

**1** Agricultural cutting implement (6)
**4** Large flying mammal (5, 3)
**9** Come into flower (5)
**10** Long-snouted nocturnal marsupial (9)
**11** Give evidence (7)
**12** Small road reflector (4, 3)
**13** Genuine (4)
**14** Member of the Church of England (8)
**17** Roof worker (8)
**19** Tug (4)
**22** Chemical mixture (7)
**24** Landscape (7)
**25** Neglect, lack of maintenance (9)
**26** Eighteenth Greek letter (5)
**27** Medieval musician (8)
**28** Tension (6)

**DOWN**

**1** Tale of woe of dreadful boss – Conservative (3, 5)
**2** Start collecting rations craftily hiding second pastry (9)
**3** Clear top politician I put inside (6)
**5** Landlord's assistant, perhaps, split local etc losing a different alternative term (4, 9)
**6** I had one of ten initially in charge – that's foolish (7)
**7** Go-between loses last element that's bankrupt (5)
**8** Stagger one adding up? (6)
**10** Outstanding black pony came and rode around (6, 7)
**15** Pain of ruin with a gale that's awful (9)
**16** Mole one finds in fruit (8)
**18** Reinforce soldiers with time after a month (7)
**20** Vehicle for transport leader accompanying them (6)
**21** Prior digital arrangement here's not new (6)
**23** Even characters from Madras get over crime (5)

Solution to Crossword No 519



# GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

## What makes us tick? Let's ask Zoom

Stuart Henshall studies human behaviour for a living. Until March, the "user research" analyst was based in a "UX [user experience] laboratory", or special conference suite, in an Indian city where he was carrying out research face to face; he'd been interviewing predominantly low-income individuals to help companies understand what makes them tick.

Convo, the consultancy he co-founded in Mumbai and San Francisco, has worked for groups such as Facebook and Bose. It sells its services with the idea that real-world "conversations matter", and in-person interviews seemed the most obvious tool to use for Indians who did manual jobs, such as *dhobis* (washermen or women) or rickshaw drivers.

But when the Covid-19 lockdowns started, Henshall, like everyone else, was forced to leap online. And after conducting thousands of hours of video calls in 2020, he has made an unexpected discovery: although doing his research virtually presents some difficulties, there are also advantages. When people enter his UX lab, the encounters tend to be formal; *dhobis*, for example, would sometimes put on their customers' clothes for interviews because they saw the lab (in the same way they might an office) as a place of staged meetings.

On a video chat, by contrast, Henshall can see his interviewees in their natural habitat, wearing their regular clothes. "Participants are simply more comfortable at home in their environment. [They] tend to feel more in control... They may feel freer and safer to share their point of view," he explains in an article for Epic, a website that promotes the use of ethnography in business. "A driver decided his idle [auto rickshaw] was the best place [to chat]. Even the bathroom is used for an interview on occasion for privacy!" All of this has helped him enormously in his research.

Of course, researchers also face downsides in this dash online: it is harder, for example, to "read" body language on a video call than in person. But Henshall is finding this new form of his work so valuable that he will almost certainly continue to use it as a complement to analogue research when face-to-face interviews become possible again.

It is a thought-provoking observation for anyone whose job requires them to eyeball people for a living and work out what motivates them (think lawyers, journalists and psychologists, for a start). And Henshall's experience is echoed by other people-watchers.

Social scientists doing UX research at Intel, the Silicon Valley giant, have made similar discoveries. Lama Nachman, director of Intel's Anticipatory Computing Lab, which works on how humans interact with computers, tells me that Intel's researchers – who include social scientists and UX experts – have been using virtual tools to study how parents, teachers and students use online education. While Intel has rarely carried out this type of virtual-only study before, doing so gives it a much wider geographic reach.

Chloe Evans does UX research into consumer behaviour for the music and podcast platform Spotify. She, like Henshall, initially assumed it would be hard to study consumers online since she has always relied on "being there" to see how they react to music in person. But, as she writes in another article on Epic's website, she realised after doing similar video chats that there were "unexpected benefits as well as some challenges" to being online: she has access to a wider geographical spread of consumers, for example, and her interviewees feel more empowered when they talk to her.

> 'Financial traders and Indian rickshaw drivers both used a more intimate style on video chat'

Through trial and error, Evans is also finding a way to minimise the downside of digital platforms, namely that it can be (even) harder to decide if people are telling the truth. Conducting video interviews with groups (or even just two other people) can make the conversation more rounded and lively, and provide the discussion with appropriate checks and balances.

Daniel Beunza Ibanez, a sociologist at the Cass London Business School who studies financial traders in the City of London and New York, has come to similar conclusions. After talking to financiers during lockdown, he saw that they – like Indian rickshaw drivers – used a more intimate communication style on video chat.

This pattern may not apply to all professions: there are some jobs that definitely suffer when they move online. But these lessons do imply that it is time for us to shift the debate about the future of work. Instead of pondering whether digital is better than analogue – or vice versa – we need to see how they can be combined in a way that enriches us all. It is not a zero-sum game.

When we do finally emerge from Covid-19 lockdowns, our ways of working will not simply revert to where we were before the pandemic hit. Our attitude to digital tools has shifted permanently, for both good and bad reasons. This is scary, but it is also producing unexpected silver linings. And if we can find an effective way to embrace the best of this new on- and offline world, therein lies a reason for cheer. FT

*gillian.tett@ft.com;* *@gilliantett*

**Answers:** The link was *The Wizard of Oz* 1. Tornado 2. Red Lion 3. First witch 4. Kansas City 5. Dorothy Wordsworth 6. Toto 7. Scarecrow 8. Oz 9. *Rainbow* 10. *Tin Man* **Picturequiz:** Eric Idle + Buddy Rich = Idle rich

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